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## SEQUENCE OR HARMONY OF TENSES?

### PART I

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The Report of the Joint Committee on Grammatical Nomenclature recommends that the term "sequence of tenses" be discontinued and that the term "harmony of tenses" be used instead. If this were merely an attempt to change the name of a recognized phenomenon, the point would not be worth much discussion; though even then one might wish that the committee had confined itself to deciding points as to which there was a real difference in usage. But the explanation embodied in the report makes it evident that this is no mere substitution of one name for another. The committee clearly gives its indorsement, at least in general, to Professor Hale's theory that there is no such thing as is commonly meant by sequence of tenses; that the tenses of the indicative and of the subjunctive alike tell their own temporal story, are alike free from mechanical rule, and are alike controlled in use only by the general laws of thought.

In discussing this recommendation of the committee, it is necessary to include with it Professor Hale's individual presentation of his theory,<sup>1</sup> because the report does not always give sufficient detail. It is not certain that the committee would indorse all the details of Professor Hale's articles. Indeed, doubt is thrown upon the whole intention of the committee by the fact that one of its members has since published a beginners' book which states the good old-fashioned doctrine of sequence of tenses for the subjunctive alone, merely giving it the name harmony. But it is not possible to interpret the language of the report in such a way that harmony shall not apply as well to the indicative as to the subjunctive.

<sup>1</sup> *AJP*, VII, 4; VIII, 1; IX, 2; Hale and Buck's *Grammar*, Secs. 474-83.

I believe that this recommendation is unsound both pedagogically and scientifically. Pedagogically, the rule of sequence seems to me so much simpler and at the same time so much more workable than the explanations involved in the doctrine of harmony that I think we should be justified in using the rule even if it were but an unscientific rule-of-thumb. Scientifically, while I believe that there are certain natural tense-relationships which hold for both moods, and that harmony is a good name for them, I do not believe that harmony fully explains the use of subjunctive tenses. I believe there was a special habit which restricted the use of subjunctive tenses almost wholly to the combinations covered by the rule of sequence. In other words, I believe that the rule of sequence, applying to the subjunctive alone, is not only convenient but true.

The present paper discusses only the pedagogical aspect of the question. In it I shall argue: first, that the doctrine of harmony is too difficult and complicated for secondary-school use; second, that the subjunctive exceptions to the rule of sequence are so few as to be negligible; and, third, that the indicative exceptions so far outnumber the subjunctive exceptions that it is grossly misleading to include the use of both moods under one statement.

1. The rule of sequence is admittedly a mechanical thing if taught in a mechanical way. It merely says that after a tense of present or future time the present or perfect subjunctive is used, after a tense of past time the imperfect or pluperfect subjunctive. It demands a very limited amount of thought for correct application to the great majority of sentences, and in itself it offers no help or explanation for exceptional sentences. Moreover, it stands convicted of certain inconsistencies. It is only fair to say, however, that nothing prevents any teacher from supplementing the rule by such explanation as he sees fit, if he himself understands tense-usage and believes his pupils can profit by explanation. Harmony, on the other hand, if it is to be taught as a less mechanical thing than sequence, is a very complicated and difficult thing. A full definition would be too long to incorporate in this paper. To be intelligible, a definition must be prefaced by a full and accurate discussion of the meanings of each tense by itself. The two essential

features of harmony are, first, that all the tenses lie in the same division of time—past, present, or future; and, second, that all the tenses are in temporal relation to one another, so that subordinate verbs, whether indicative or subjunctive, employ relative tenses. Its full application in teaching requires keen and careful analysis of the thought in every sentence. Taught in this way, with full appreciation of the meaning of each tense on the one hand, and of each clause on the other, the doctrine of harmony would make this part of Latin grammar a reasonable thing, and would no doubt discipline most admirably the mind of any schoolboy who might survive it.

But it may seem possible to condense the main features of the doctrine of harmony into a teachable sentence. So far as I know, the only attempt to do this is sec. 476 of Hale and Buck's *Grammar*: "A main tense of the past is generally accompanied by a dependent Imperfect or Past Perfect, and a main tense of the present or future by a dependent Present, Perfect, Future, or Future Perfect." If a teacher should isolate this rule from the rest of the treatment of tenses and should teach it only in connection with the subjunctive, he would have merely the usual rule of sequence; and, in fact, "Sequence of Tenses" is given as an alternative heading. This is precisely its weakness. If taught by itself, it is as mechanical as any other rule of sequence; if taught in connection with the succeeding sections and as a statement of harmony, it is incomplete and inconsistent. For it seems to permit the combination of a present depending on a future, or of a historical perfect depending on a present or future, or of other tenses from different divisions of time, just as the usual rule of sequence does. And yet in sec. 479 the historical perfect depending on a present or future, though called "natural and common," is given under the heading "Less Usual Combinations of Tenses ('Exceptions to Sequence')." And this is unavoidable, since the two acts lie in different divisions of time. Page 61 of the Report makes this very clear. "*Absence of harmony*.—Once in a while, however, we have occasion to put acts together without harmony of tense. This happens in one of the two following ways: (1) The acts may be in different divisions of time. . . . (2) The acts may be in the same division of time,

but the subordinate one may be looked at absolutely." Obviously no rule which permits the combination of a historical perfect with a present or future can be a rule of harmony. Therefore there is, so far as I know, no short and simple rule of harmony.

If, then, anything is to be gained by the change from sequence to harmony, tense-usage must be taught in detail, so that the pupil shall be able to think out and feel the right tenses in all combinations. Then Latin will seem a reasonable thing, and exceptional sequence will give no more trouble than regular. But it is no easy thing to gain an understanding and a feeling for tense-usage. Is it worth the time? Is it even possible in secondary Latin classes? How many teachers themselves have it? Plautus, *Amph.* 429, had occasion to say, "There was a cask of wine: from it I filled my jug." He said, "cadus erat vini: inde implevi hirneam." If I understand Professor Hale's writings, he would say that *erat* expresses a past situation and is the only possible tense. But Professor Bennett, *Syntax of Early Latin: The Verb*, p. 34, cites the sentence as evidence that the imperfect may be used where the perfect would be expected, saying, "here *erat* seems to me of the same nature as *implevi*. . . . The obvious force of the verb is a simple past." I am not concerned to argue which is right. But if two eminent syntacticians cannot agree on so simple and common a combination of tenses, what are we to expect from pupils who attempt to untangle the complicated combinations in Caesar's indirect discourse?

It is to be hoped that this will not be understood as an argument for discouraging thinking in the study of Latin. It is intended as an argument for careful discrimination between the things that are worth thinking out at any cost of time and those that are best avoided by a workable rule-of-thumb. There are literally myriads of possible subjects for thought. Some must be slighted. Each teacher must decide for himself what will best repay the efforts of his class, what will not. To me it seems that an understanding of the underlying forces in Latin syntax is not the great aim of Latin study, and that the immense difficulty of Latin tense-usage justifies us in employing a convenient rule-of-thumb if there is one that works.

2. The rule of sequence works so well in practice that pupils who read Caesar, Cicero, and Vergil for three years encounter rather less than one exception a month, on the average. I dare not state positively the number of exceptions in any part of Latin literature, partly because others might not agree with me in deciding what should be called exceptions; but my figures are at least very near the truth. In Caesar, *B.G.* i-iv, I believe Meusel's text gives only 2 clear exceptions, outside of the indirect discourse; namely, i. 26. 2 and ii. 21. 5. In the indirect discourse Heynacher counted some 20 exceptions, by including all the instances where secondary sequence changes to primary by *repraesentatio*, a phenomenon no more to be considered exceptional than the use of the historical present for the historical perfect. Two or three of these verbs may correspond to exceptions in the direct form; but I am not convinced that a single one, as it stands in the indirect discourse, can rightly be called an exception. In the six orations of Cicero which are commonly read I believe there are 14 exceptions, 8 of them the perfect subjunctive in result clauses. In the first six books of the *Aeneid* I believe there are 7 exceptions. If these figures are correct, there are 23 exceptions to be encountered in the usual high-school course, plus so many of Caesar's instances of *repraesentatio* as one chooses to add. This number of exceptions need not disturb us much in teaching the rule. In fact, even those who disbelieve in the rule ought to teach their pupils that though the rule does not exist the subjunctive tenses behave as if they followed it.

3. But the enormous excess of indicative exceptions over subjunctive ought to disturb seriously those who believe that a single statement can be made to cover the use of both indicative and subjunctive tenses. The report gives no hint that indicative exceptions are more frequent than subjunctive. Hale and Buck's *Grammar*, sec. 477, italicizes the statement that the relations described in its rule for harmony hold for indicatives and subjunctives alike. Its later statement, sec. 478a, "Unrelated tenses are less frequent in Subjunctive than in Indicative clauses," falls far short of conveying the full truth. Years ago I tested the possibility of applying the rule of sequence to both moods by making a complete count

of Caesar's regular uses and exceptions in the whole seven books of the *Gallic War*, using Kraner's text. In that text I believe there are 1,894 dependent subjunctive verbs, of which 10 seem to me exceptions, and 1,243 dependent indicative verbs, of which 291 seem to me exceptions. Again it must be said that the instances of *repraesentatio* in indirect discourse are not included, so that some would increase the number of subjunctive exceptions. Those figures mean that only a little over half of 1 per cent of the dependent subjunctives are exceptions, while about 23 per cent of the dependent indicatives are exceptions. In other words, Caesar's indicative exceptions are about 44 times as numerous as his subjunctive exceptions. This disproportion would be lessened, of course, by counting some of the cases of *repraesentatio*, but by any count it would remain very great. Caesar is more regular than most other authors in his use of the subjunctive tenses. According to the count made by two of my students for Byrne's *Syntax of High School Latin*, indicative exceptions are relatively between 9 and 10 times more numerous than subjunctive exceptions in the parts of Cicero and Vergil which are commonly read. Whatever may be the true explanation of this great disparity, clearly it is neither safe nor fair to the high-school pupil to offer him a single statement for the two moods. If it must be done, the rule should conclude with these words: "This rule applies alike to indicative and subjunctive, but indicative exceptions are from 10 to 40 times as numerous as subjunctive."

The second part of this paper will discuss the theoretical question whether this disparity can be explained without assuming the existence of a sequence-habit which affected the use of subjunctive tenses only.

[To be continued]